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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUBLIN 000050

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EI](#)  
SUBJECT: IRISH VIEWS ON PROGRESS OF NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE  
PROCESS

REF: BELFAST 8

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Classified By: DCM Robert J. Faucher; Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: During her visit to Ireland January 16, EUR/WE Office Director Kathy Allegrone met with Department of Foreign Affairs Anglo-Irish Division Director General Pat Hennessy, and Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) International Affairs Advisor Martin Fraser, to discuss the Irish view of the current state of the Northern Ireland peace process. Both officials expressed gratification that the process has proceeded so well in such a short time, but identified a number of problems. Lack of capability in the Northern Ireland civil service, they said, could adversely affect economic development and community reconciliation, as well as the planned investment conference in May 2008. They identified this summer's marching season as a potential flashpoint for trouble. Neither official appeared unduly worried that the peace process will founder over the issue of the devolution of policing and justice, though they thought the May 2008 timetable for devolution is likely to slip. We are confident that we will get a quick heads-up from the Irish if they think the peace process is beginning to falter seriously. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The Taoiseach's International Advisor, Martin Fraser, pointed to the civil service of the Northern Ireland Assembly (NIA) as in need of reform. Not only is it too big, he said, it is also generally unresponsive to the sort of innovative change needed as the North develops its economy and reconciles its communities. He noted, in particular, that key officials in the bureaucracy appear reluctant to deal with Government of Ireland officials or support North-South cooperation -- a hangover, he said, from the days of sectarian violence when the Government of Ireland was perceived by many unionists in the North to be siding with republican militants.

¶3. (C) Of immediate concern, Fraser noted, is the USG-sponsored investment conference, planned for May 2008. Fraser indicated that the Irish Government would feel more confident in the success of the conference if organizers in the NIA Ministry of Enterprise, Trade, and Investment were more forthcoming in communicating with their counterparts in the South. Fraser mused that the communication difficulties could be caused by the Minister of Enterprise, Trade, and Investment Nigel Dodds, a staunch unionist.

¶4. (C) Fraser also said he thought the Northern Ireland civil service -- and, indeed, the politicians -- were very inexperienced at playing on the international stage. He commented that they seemed to take access to senior officials

in the UK, EU and U.S. for granted and didn't take good advantage of such access, not realizing that the window of opportunity for such contacts is closing. He concluded that the Assembly needs all the help it can get.

15. On a positive note, Fraser said there have been many useful contacts between Northern Ireland politicians and the Irish Government. Fraser mentioned that when NIA members go overseas, they seek out assistance from the Irish Embassy rather than their own NIA liaison offices. He commented that when Nigel Dodds was in Washington recently, he sought out a photo opportunity with Irish Ambassador Michael Collins in the Irish Embassy -- a place Dodds would have regarded as "enemy territory" not so long ago. Pat Hennessy noted that NIA First Minister Ian Paisley asked the Irish Embassy in Brussels to coordinate his recent visit there.

16. (C) Fraser stated that the Government of Ireland is still working within the framework of the Good Friday Agreement, which includes the devolution of policing and justice from Westminster to the Northern Ireland Assembly. Fraser said the Irish Government understands the fundamental conflict between the unionist Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which is reluctant to devolve policing and justice in May 2008, and the republican Sinn Fein party, which agreed in January 2007 to endorse policing in the North based, in part, on an understanding that policing and justice would be devolved in May 2008. Both sides, he said, have legitimate concerns about meeting the expectations of their rank-and-file supporters.

17. (C) However, Fraser said, contacts the Irish Government has had with Sinn Fein so far indicate that Sinn Fein is not yet overly worried about the May 2008 deadline. In coming weeks, Fraser pointed out, the political process will proceed, including the outcome of the NIA Committee on Devolution of Policing and Justice, led by DUP member Jeffrey

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Donaldson. Fraser said that the negotiating process could well produce the desired result. He wryly commented, "We will know when Sinn Fein is really worried." (Note: Sinn Fein President Gerry Adams met recently with both the Consul General in Belfast (reftel) and Ambassador Foley in Dublin to express his concern about not meeting the May 2008 deadline. End Note.) The bottom line, in Fraser's opinion, is that devolution of policing and justice will occur this year, but probably not in May.

18. (C) In spite of two trouble-free seasons, both Fraser and Hennessy identified this summer's marching season, which will be underway in May when devolution is scheduled to occur, as a potential flashpoint for trouble.

19. (C) Hennessy's views largely coincided with that of Fraser, including some unease about the capabilities of the NIA politicians, the NIA civil service, and the progress of planning for the May 2008 investment conference. Hennessy felt that the recent meeting of Ian Paisley and Martin McGuinness with President Bush made a significant contribution to cementing the peace, noting that since that visit, Paisley seemed more comfortable in his role.

110. (C) Commenting on the issue of policing and justice in the North, Hennessy acknowledged the difficulty of achieving devolution, but noted some positive signs. He commented that Paisley has not said anything recently that would make it more difficult to proceed with devolution negotiations, that each side has been careful to deal with other contentious issues in ways that do not scotch the negotiations over devolution, that both sides understand the significance of policing and justice and their responsibilities under the Good Friday Agreement and St. Andrew's Agreement, and that the ongoing work of the NIA Committee on the Devolution of Policing and Justice demonstrates that the DUP wants to be ready to implement devolution when the political time is

ripe. Hennessy agreed with Fraser that devolution will occur, though not necessarily in May, saying, "It's an article of faith that the DUP will break the May 2008 deadline."

¶11. (C) Hennessy said it will be very important that outside forces -- the U.S., the British Government, and the Irish Government -- continue to robustly remind the DUP of their obligation to accept the devolution of policing and justice. The DUP will need such pressure to persuade its rank-and-file that it has no choice, Hennessy declared, and will expect such pressure to be forthcoming. In the end, Hennessy stated, the Government of Ireland will accede to whatever timeframe for devolution Sinn Fein and the DUP agree between themselves.

¶12. (C) Comment: The Irish Government does not appear to be unduely worried at this point that the peace process will founder over the issue of the devolution of policing and justice, though the timetable for such devolution is in question. We are confident that we will get a quick heads-up from the Irish if they think the process is beginning to falter seriously.

FOLEY